DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 089 242 CS 001 014

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TITLE Questing the "Land of the Taffeta Dawn" through Basal Readers.
PUB DATE May 73
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (18th, Denver, May 1-4, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Basic Reading; *Creative Dramatics; Elementary Grades; *Interpretive Reading; Literary Analysis; Reading; Reading Achievement; *Reading Development; Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Materials; Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

This paper presents some ways of helping young children to extend their imaginative powers through an interpretative recreation of literary selections and some techniques for reading various literary genres imaginatively. Various teachers' guides and manuals that suggest ways to read literature in a critical and imaginative manner are discussed. The materials suggested include: "Teaching the Reading of Fiction"; "Bright Horizons: A Collection, Book 6," which provides the students with samplings from novels and drama; "Bright Horizons: A Collection, Book 4," which includes a variety of books to help pupils note different literary genres; "Windows, Doorways, Bridges," which includes creative playmaking sessions; "Special Happenings, Level 12," "Never Give Up, Level 11," and "Freedom's Ground, Level 14," which includes plays that can serve as models for young playwrights; 'Creative Dramatics in the Classroom," which discusses how teachers can develop plays gradually; "Puppetry Today," which includes information on shadow puppets; and "Reading, Self"Directive Dramatization and Self Concept," which presents procedures in self-directive dramatization. (WR)

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"Questing the 'Land of the Taffeta Dawn' through Basal Readers"

In a delightful little picture book created by Natalia Belting and illustrated by Joseph Low (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1973) one reads of the fabulous great empire of T'ang China the Land of Silk and its taffeta dawn and the "Gates of Spring Brightness, The Gate of Gold Light, and The Red Phoenix Gate. This is a land of "damasks and cottons like sunrise clouds," a world of pagodas, and pavilions and kiosks, and a spot where "Blue feathered kingfishers/hunt among Crimson lotuses/while hundred-hued dragonflies/Skim white and yellow water lilies".... This is the land of imagination, and it is this imaginative phase of reading which shall be discussed in relation to basal readers.

The basal reader or the basal literature text is here defined as a book which is part of a planned reading system and is organized in a manner to offer sequential reading skills to individuals or groups of readers. In recent years such books are

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organized into systems often having satellite materials such as recordings, film strips, vocabulary cards, or other auxiliary material. Many criteria could be applied to the selection of basal literature texts but some general criteria outlined by Ellin Greene and Madalynne Schoenfeld in the preface to A Multi-Media Approach to Children's Literature (Chicago: American Library Association, 1972) (7) seem appropriate when attention is focused on the creative, imaginative phases of reading. These authors outline the general criteria for evaluating children's books as "respect for children's intelligence and imagination, storytelling quality (plot, characterization, theme, and style), and content of interest to children...".(7)

In this brief presentation attention will be focused upon two aspects of literature reading: one, some techniques of reading various literary genres imaginatively, and two, some ways of helping young children to extend their imaginative powers through an interpretative recreation of literary selections read. Various teachers' manuals and guides accompanying basal literature texts frequently suggest ways to read literature in a critical, imaginative manner.

In addition to these teacher aids, one basic guide which can be adopted by all teachers is Teaching the Reading of Fiction by Elizabeth Ann Parker (15). In this text, Miss Parker outlines

five elements or structural aspects of every story which include: character, incident, time, place, and mood. She indicates that character is frequently revealed through appearance and environment, actions, thoughts, speech, reactions to others and reactions to other characters. (16) The author clearly outlines ten general story-reading abilities which can be separated for purpose of analyses, but ones which are often interrelated in the development of the total impact of a story. These ten reading abilities are how to:

1. Comprehend implied meanings
2. Follow a sequence of events
3. Predict outcomes
4. Detect mood
5. Form and react to sensory images
6. Note significant details
7. Appreciate humor, exaggeration, incongruity
8. Comprehend extended metaphor
9. Comprehend symbol
10. Detect author's perspective. (17)

In this helpful little book Elizabeth Parker discusses these ten competencies through excerpts from such well-known children's texts as The Cat Who Went to Heaven by Elizabeth Coatsworth (Macmillan Company, 1958); Charlotte's Web by E. B. White (Harper and

Row, 1952); The Hundred Dresses by Eleanor Estes (Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., 1944); The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe by C. S. Lewis (The Macmillan Company, 1950); My Side of the Mountain by Jean George (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1959); Roller Skates by Ruth Sawyer (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1964); and Shadow of a Bull by Maia Wojciechowska (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1964).

One of the newer trends seen in publishing literature basal texts is illustrated through such a book as Bright Horizons: A Collection, Book 6, published by Scott, Foresman and Company. (9) Numerous literature samplers are available where students get a sampling from a novel or drama, and most basal texts frequently consist of a number of short stories which are frequently abbreviated. This text, however, includes books which are either printed in their entirety or printed in large enough versions to give pupils a sense of reading a whole book instead of a little snippet which is isolated from the context of a larger imaginative experience. This volume includes Ash Road by Ivan Southall, (St. Martin's Press, Inc., and Argus and Robertson, Ltd.); The Man Who Was Don Quixote by Rafaello Busoni (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.); Dorp Dead by Julia Cunningham (Pantheon Books, a Division of Random House, Inc. and William

Heinemann, Ltd.); Winter Thunder by Mari Sandoz (The Westminster Press, 1951 and One Is One by Barbara Leonie Picard (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. and Oxford University Press, 1965).

Both Ash Road by Southall and Winter Thunder by Sandoz are strong survival stories - the overwhelming will to survive against powerful environmental forces such as the raging hurricane of a fire and the beating blizzard of snow, wind, and ice. Immature readers can be helped to identify imaginatively with the tone and mood of each of these novels through reacting to the sensory images and significant details furnished by the authors. First of all, students can be asked to visualize the possible significance of the title, Ash Road. In most person's minds ashes symbolize something consumed by fire and flame. Does the title of this novel serve as a symbol for the inner significance of the tale? As pupils read this novel, they can list words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs which depict searing heat and blistering flames. There was "a flickering world of tree trunks and twisted boughs, of scrubs and saplings and stones, of shouts and wind and smoke and frantic fear. It was so quick. It was terrible." (10) In a paragraph or two later, one reads: "Even the ground was burning; humus was burning. There were flames on the trees; bark was burning; foliage was flaring, flaring like a whipcrack; and the heat was savage and searing

and awful to breathe" (11) Southall builds up mood and tension through piling up image after image of heat and fire and its effects on the people in the novel, in a sharp, staccato writing style. Young readers can imaginatively identify with the plights of the people in the novel through noting the fiery images. In many instances, Southall has used colorful imagery for sections of his novel. Such ones as "The Angry Day" "Dead End", "Men Stand Up and Fight," and "The Moment of Truth" can be used as a means of detecting the mood of the novel and as a means of predicting outcomes.

On the other hand, Sandoz in Winter Thunder utilizes a flowing, quiet style to depict the inevitability of a blustering blizzard with drifting snowflakes piling up their feathery force through which a school teacher and her band of pupils stumble and flounder. Young readers can concentrate on sensory images depicting winter storms and the frightening freezing power of the blizzard. Such phrases as "twenty below zero", "shaking and frozen", "tears freezing on her face", "out of breath and frozen", "ice covered head of a calf", and "white blizzard darkness" offer images of suffering and cold.

Both Ash Road and Winter Thunder depict dauntless characters who show great resourcefulness in times of peril. Young readers can identify examples of resourcefulness in each novel and com-

pare resourceful characters. For instance, Lecia Terry in Winter Thunder can be compared with Lorna George in Ash Road.

Bright Horizons: A Collection or Book 4 of the Scott Foresman literature series (12) includes a variety of books which help pupils to note different literary genres. For instance, The Alligator Case by William Pene du Bois (Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965) offers an example of a humorous tale in contrast to The Apple and the Arrow by Mary and Conrad Buff (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951) which offers the historic legend of the Swiss hero, William Tell. A careful reading of The Alligator Case helps young readers to appreciate humor with its use of exaggeration and incongruity to make amusing incidents. Children can visualize the scene of Mr. Fish batting peas into his mouth with pork chops and can also enjoy the play upon words of the boy who says, "I am a detective and should at all times pass undetected." Even the names of Mr. Bromwell, Miss Journey, and Mr. Fish help to set the stage for humorous incidents. As a contrast to humor, children who read The Apple and the Arrow can learn to appreciate some of the qualities of a legend which is a tale centered on an historical figure or event in a way to make the central figure even more heroic than he actually was.

In addition to learning how to read literature imaginatively through the use of good basal series, young readers can identify

themselves personally with an author's tale through a reinterpretation of a novel or a short story through some sort of a creative experience. Creative drama offers many opportunities for the transformation of ideas in a different setting. Creative drama can take many forms from a simple transformation of a story into more lines of direct dialogue and an oral interpretation of the lines to more elaborate dramas using masks, shadowgraphs, puppets, or marionettes. One of the basic experiences which all children should have is that of creative playmaking. This frequently consists of the following steps: (1) the reading of a story which is particularly applicable to drama; (2) a discussion of the story and a decision of casts of characters, settings, and props necessary for its reenactment; (3) the use of a narrator or narrators to offer a setting and background of characters; (4) the selection of a cast; (5) acting out of one scene in which actors create their own dialogue extemporaneously; (6) an evaluation step based on positive suggestions on ways the scene might be replayed; (7) a replaying of the scene by the same cast or a different cast, and (8) the addition of other scenes. Frequently, primary grade teachers do excellent directing of creative playmaking sessions, but as children progress through the grades most examples of creative playmaking disappear as intermediate grade pupils woodenly act out their parts as they try to memorize their lines in a verbatim fashion.

Before teachers attempt creative playmaking sessions, children should probably understand the difference between a play and a story or novel. They can learn that italics are frequently used to indicate an actor's action. Also, they should familiarize themselves with the use of acts or scenes to show different aspects of dramatic action. The basal text Windows, Doorways Bridges, one of the books in Scott Foresman Reading Systems (1) includes the play, Stone Soup based on a Russian folktale by James Bucchler. This play lists a cast of characters, the time of action, and a setting. Stage directions are printed in blue ink. (2) This makes it easier to differentiate action from dialogue. Children may enjoy rewriting one of the stories from this same book in dramatic form such as "Paul Bunyan's Red River Camp" by Dell J. McCormick or "Ben Bailey Meets His Match" by May Justus. Authors can use Stone Soup as a model and can use a Pentel or some form of a magic marker pen to indicate stage business in colored ink.

Many basal texts offer examples of plays which can serve as a model for young playwrights. Several books in the Holt Basic Reading System include plays. Special Happenings, Level 12 includes the play "Mr. Hare" by Gardell Dano Christensen.(5) Never Give Up, Level 11 includes "Homerhenry" a play by Cora Annett which has six short acts; (6) and Freedom's Groundg, Level 14

includes "The Reluctant Dragon" a play dramatized from the story by Kenneth Grahame (19) children who read these plays can take them as a model for the creation of their own original plays.

Sometimes, intermediate grade pupils are shy and need some impromptu dramatic experiences to prepare them for more elaborate acting situations. Creative Dramatics in the Classroom by Nellie McCaslum (David McKay) is a good basic book which helps teachers to develop plays gradually. Helpful chapters are ones on pantomime, improvisation, dramatic structure, and ways of building plays from simple stories. (14) Another helpful book which develops drama in sequential developmental steps is Seven Steps to Creative Children's Dramatics by Pamela Prince Walker. (Hill + Wang) (18) This book also includes three plays "Land of Jesters," "Rumpelstiltskin" and "Around the World in Eighty Days."

The tape recorder is being used so frequently in the classroom that radio plays help to extend an imaginative identification with the mood and tone of a tale. Children can be ingenious in providing different sound effects for a sensitive microphone. Several professional recordings of sound effects, are also available. Fan Kissen has written The Golden Goose and other Plays (Houghton Mifflin) which includes many basic folk tales such as "The Little Pine Tree that Wanted New Leaves" and "The Frog Prince." (13) She has also written many other books of plays including: The Straw Ox, The Bag of

(Houghton Mifflin)

Fire, The Crowded House, and They Helped Make America. Some of these books give directions for making sound effects for radio plays.

Most children are ingenious in making simple puppets such as stick puppets, paper bag puppets, or ones made out of vegetables or socks. An easy puppet to make is to use a lady's plastic or metal hair curler and a styrofoam ball as a base. After the puppet is dressed and the ball is decorated such a puppet is easy to manipulate. A good book is Puppet Making through the Grades by Grizella H. Hopper (Worcester, Massachusetts: Davis Publications, Inc., 1966). One type of puppet which children love to make is the shadowgraph variety which is usually made of heavy construction paper with tongue depressors or a wire attached. Lights come from above or behind the puppets and a figure is projected on white paper in a box puppet theater. A book by Helen Binyon entitled Puppetry Today (New York: Watson-Guptil Publications, Inc., 1966) includes two chapters on shadow puppets.

Numerous basal reader texts have some forms of folk tales from various countries of the world. Books of African folk tales and many myths and legends of various native American Indian tribes lend themselves to a dramatic form using some form of masks. Two helpful books on the production of masks are Masks and Mask Makers by Kari Hunt and Bernice Wells Carlson (New

York: Abingdon Press, 1961) and Mask Making: Creative Methods and Techniques by Matthew Baranski (Worcester, Massachusetts: Davis Publications, Inc., 1966).

In this presentation, I have discussed two types of imagination-extending activities. One of these has consisted of some developmental reading activities on how to read fiction. The second type of extension has consisted of an interpretation of literature through creative dramatics. Both of these types of experiences can be unified through some self-dramatization techniques which are outlined in Reading, Self-Directive Dramatization and Self Concept by Lessie Carlton and Robert H. Moore. (4) Some of the procedures in self-directive dramatization are as follows: (1) The teacher or an aide displays many basal readers, literature series, and books of folk tales in an accessible area so children can browse; (2) a child selects a book which is at his own individual reading level and finds a story which he would like to dramatize; (3) he decides upon scenes or acts and four or five characters which he would like to have enacted in some dramatic form; (4) after he has decided upon his characters, he selects children from his class to be actors. It is more successful if the cast is limited to a small number of actors; (5) the initiator serves as the play director or selects a director and children rehearse the play. (6) If children have not read the

story, they will have to read it orally prior to the acting session. (7) When the cast and director have rehearsed their play enough to be satisfied with it, they invite the teacher or a judge to see it. How much more vital this procedure is than such a one as "Barber Shop Reading" or "Queen Victoria's Ladies in Waiting" where each child sits around in a circle and awaits his turn.

In questing the "Land of the Taffeta Dawn" children and teachers must follow the path of Simone Weil who speaks of the mysterious, enigmatic quality of reaching beyond words. (8) As we quest the "Taffeta Dawn" one visualizes a world of "dancing horses caparisoned in embroidered saffron silk/Bridled with silver and gold, Manes plaited with jade and pearls" and a world in which the emperor goes to his "Palace of Beautiful Flowers" where miniature mountains are "carved of lapis lazuli ." (3) We can reach this mystical world if our imaginations are nourished and children learn to reach beyond words.

as quoted in Beyond Words by James E. Higgins (TC Columbia Press)

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